

THE EXISTENCE OF SWEAT SHOPS?

A New and Striking Argument by the President of the Consumers' League.



"No; for employers would have to engage women to work in their factories, in place of having them work at home. In the factories they would be under the supervision of official inspectors, acting under the provisions of the State Factory laws. Little children would not be allowed to work, as they do now in the homes. Women would not be allowed to work half the night in addition to all day. There would be a vast decrease in the number of women who, at the present, break down and go to the lunatic asylum or the almshouse, or else give up in bitter despair and seek the short-lived sinful glitter of the streets.

"We are constantly sending out what we call our 'white list.' That is, our list of store keepers who we believe are trying to act fairly toward their employes, and those from whom goods are purchased. We 'black list' nobody. We are not boycotters in even the slightest degree. We labor directly with dealers, in explaining our aims and system, but we lay more stress on our work in arousing the public mind, for the dealers, after all, must act as the public tell them. And in every possible way we shall try to rouse indiscriminate bargain hunters to a sense of the evils and suffering that they are inflicting on the unhappy people who are kept in a state of semi-starvation that the bargain hunters may experience the cheerful glow of money saved, although saved at such a heavy cost to the sufferers."

A brief tour among sweat shop workers emphasized only too clearly the arguments of the president of the League. In one room three women were busily at work. One raised her eyes as I entered, but the other two could not afford to waste even a few moments of precious daylight.

"You are working on aprons. May I ask what you are paid for them?" I said.

The woman smiled bitterly. "Twenty-two cents a dozen," she said. "My sister is making neckties. She gets \$1.25 a gross." Then she, too, again bent her eyes over her work, for daylight was precious, and it behooved them to finish all they could before the coming of darkness would compel them to burn a few cents' worth of oil.

In one room I found two women hard at work on some beautiful silk waists. They had no objection to telling me what they were paid; they got 30 cents a dozen, for the elaborately-wrought articles. And I felt heartsick as I remembered with a pang that I had been one of a crowd of women who, but a week before, had jammed about a bargain counter where waists, possibly the work of these very women, were offered at a fearfully low price. And I thought again of the words of Mrs. Nathan: "Not living wages; those are dying wages."

Night robes, \$1 a dozen; cambric dresses, \$1.20 a dozen; coats, 35 cents a dozen; knee pants, 50 cents a dozen, were some of the prices I found.

And in one tenement home I came across what seemed the veriest sarcasm on the bargain-hunting system. A woman was making wrappers, and was



"If Bargain Hunters Did Not Flock to the Stores, Demanding the Cheapest Goods, Dealers Would Not Be Compelled to Buy at Wretchedly Low Prices."

working with a swift deftness that was amazing. I asked what they were worth, and her reply reminded me, with almost a shock, of the many times that I had seen articles offered in stores, at prices just a little below even money; at, for example, 98 cents, or \$1.97. For the poor woman was making those wrappers for 49 cents a dozen!

The practical side of education for young women has often been questioned. Latin and Greek, algebra and higher mathematics, ologies and ophies, have taken sides against plain sewing, practical housework, and an understanding of domestic economics, but never with a result at all satisfactory, either to teachers or pupils.

A plan recently adopted in the Brooklyn public schools has gained great popularity, and may be introduced in New York and other cities. This is a course in practical baking. After instruction in making bread and cake, the girl pupils have the excitement of a contest. Judges are chosen from among the wives of the city officials, and awards are given to the victors. That the product of these contests is subsequently sent to a home for the blind is not to be taken as a reflection on the appearance of the Brooklyn girls' culinary products.

The growth of girls is greatest in their fifteenth year, and that of boys in the seventeenth.

Day."---A Sermon by the Rev Alice K. Wright.

cles sewed with a loop stitch, take them home and let them go to pieces in the first wash, or go over every seam yourself on your machine; buy everything, anything, whether you want it or not; buy it because you see others buying it—but, above all things, buy because it is marked "bargain."

No one blames the ambitious woman with a small income straining every nerve to make the best appearance, even if she is vying with her neighbor who has twice the income; but be careful that it is your own nerve force that you are straining, and not that of the sweat shop girl.

With each shirt waist or other garment you buy be sure that there are not lurking among its folds the sobs and sighs of a famished shop girl. You have bought an article cheap; she has made it and possibly received one-tenth of what you paid for it. She did the work (except what you did, poor creature! in your bargain counter struggle), and yet she does not make enough to live on.

Don't say, in a grandiloquent manner, that by buying ready-made clothes at a bargain counter you are aiding in the support of many of your sex. You are not; you are simply making it possible for the sweat shop to remain open, to employ thousands of women at starvation prices.

Women, give up this bargaining in which there is no gain. Spend your husband's money wisely. Buy one garment, properly made, that will outwear two or three of the worthless affairs turned out by the thousands. Where there is a demand there will always be a supply. Suppress this demand, and you can go in peace, for by so doing you have helped your sex, you have aided those who cannot aid themselves, you have made it possible for them to get better wages, to lead a nobler, healthier and purer life, which they cannot now live while the bargain counter demands the existence of the sweat shop.

ALICE K. WRIGHT.